Research and risk assessment: Two sides of the same coin?

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Room 1

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Risk assessment is a tool to support decision making in circumstances where there is a considerable amount of uncertainty. The degree of uncertainty, and the consequent need for use of assumptions or "guesstimates" to produce an estimation of risk, is widely dependent on the availability and quality of data.

Research data constitute an important part of the data for risk assessment, although other data, such as those gained from monitoring and control activities, also contribute. The quality of data from published research is generally perceived as superior to data from other sources, because of the inherent quality assurance process. Although research data in food safety are abundant, in most risk assessments there is a major lack of adequate of data, primarily because data from research rarely fits the specific needs of the risk assessors. Therefore, many risk assessments result in an uncertain risk estimate, and a long and specific list of data needs. This is particularly the case for microbial risk assessments.

In an ideal world, the research community and funding bodies at large would be aware of the data needs of risk assessors, and systematically strive to generate this information. However, in the real world, the research which is funded, and the way research is conducted, is much more diverse, and from the perspective of risk assessment much less optimal. This presentation will discuss the apparent paradoxes and dilemmas at the interface between risk assessment and research, and offer suggestions for solutions.

HENRIK CASPAR WEGENER

Henrik Wegener's main field of work has been surveillance, research and risk assessment in relation to microbial food safety. He has been involved in the implementation of Danish, European and WHO/FAO integrated surveillance and control schemes for food-borne zoonoses, and has worked on the development of national and international strategies for the prudent use of antimicrobials in food animals. In 2006 he became the director of the National Food Institute, and in 2011 chief academic officer and vice executive president of the Technical University of Denmark. He has published more than 100 scientific papers and book chapters, as well as numerous other publications.